

**Email correspondence with Roslyn M. Frank about the webpage
"Parts of the true story of a world picture"
(<http://www.nbi.dk/~natphil/Siberian.html>), June 2006.**

This page's URL: http://www.nbi.dk/~natphil/worldpicture/Roz_Frank_june2006.pdf

[Roz 1 (June 16)]

> BTW, I wanted to mention that I found it interesting that you have a
> section on "shamanism" on your web site and the reproduction of the
> Siberian shaman drum. I've done research on these notions of
> cosmological 'modeling' and 'mapping' for many years.

[Claus 1 (June 16)]

Amazing! For so long there have been silence on this page, but right
now I am updating it, as I got a mail from a student in Estonia, see
the new version on
<http://www.nbi.dk/~natphil/Siberian.html>
and what you write is indeed interesting, -

[Roz 2 (June 21)]

It occurs to me that perhaps you could use another mystery .jpg, :--))
one that I have been seeking to identify for years. Let me explain
briefly what the situation is with it.

Several years back I was preparing a working paper on the socio-
political significance of menhir-like stones, also called "uprights",
in Europe, specifically in the Basque region where they have somewhat
more cultural continuity than in other parts of Europe. The short
version of the research is that these stone uprights along with
certain other stone circle configurations were associated directly with
the socio-political identity of the group that inhabited
that specific zone. The upright stones were "witnesses" of a sort,
standing symbolically for the group/community and its rights. Hence,
some of these stones survived into modern times as locations where
contracts had to be performed by the interested parties, i.e., with the
"swearing stone" as a witness, as well as sites for political
assemblies. In addition, there is ample evidence for offerings being
left at the stones; these social practices appear to be related in some
fashion to the veneration of ancestors, and are similar to the
commonplace custom of leaving flowers and food for the deceased at
their burial stones.

Then, as someone who has been active for many years in the Société
Européenne pour la Astronomie dans la Culture/European Society for
Astronomy in Culture (SEAC/ESAC)
[<http://www.archeoastronomy.org/index.php>], the connections between
these megalithic sites and the surviving remnants of earlier symbolic
practices associated with them has always intrigued me. Indeed, I have
collected a number of decrees by the Church Councils from the early
Middle Ages where they prohibit certain practices, implying, of course,
that such practices took place.

After talking with some of my colleagues from Siberia, I was told that
such upright stones and stone circles were abundant in that zone. When
I began to search the web I came across a remarkable photo from
somewhere in Siberia showing a woman (a shamaness, perhaps) with her
paraphernalia who appears to be "feeding" the upright stone. But what
is even more remarkable is that one can see a man in the background,
standing inside a stone circle whose configuration is such that we

could be talking about any one of hundreds of stone circles in the UK, for example.

Of course, we have no "photos" of Europeans conducting these rituals at their uprights, only indirect, inferential evidence that they did so, e.g., Church decrees and folk beliefs.

Here are the google images of some of these stone circles:
<http://images.google.com/images?q=stone+circles&hl=en&btnG=Search+Images>

Then here is the web site of Clive Ruggles, a good friend and colleague who works with us in SEAC/ESAC and has done extensive fieldwork with me in the Basque Country.
<http://www.le.ac.uk/ar/rug/>

And his extensive photo archive:
http://www.le.ac.uk/archaeology/rug/image_collection/hier/bi/

To conclude this discussion on the mystery jpeg, I'll forward to you my last futile email to the Siberian researchers who either don't know English or are otherwise preoccupied with other matters and are not able to respond to emails. That email has a copy of the photo in question attached to it and an explanation of what we know about it.

[Roz 1 (June 16)]

> I'm particularly fascinated with the remnants of these older systems
> that show up in Europe. As you probably know, I work with Basque
> materials which have retained much older pan-European (folk)beliefs,
> e.g., that humans descend from bears. If you are familiar with the
> Khanti-Mansi materials, et al, you'll sense echos of the ursine
> nature of Numi Torum, the "sky bear" (associated in turn with a
> hunting scene depicted by the circumpolar stars of Ursa Major, i.e.,
> the beliefs were "projected" onto the sky screen)

[Claus 1 (June 16)]

fascinating!, I am a complete novice in all of this, and your information intrigues my curiosity, - does that mean that maybe the shaman on the drum picture might have tried to imitate, or be, a bear? As you might know, that shamanic cultures viewed the bear as either an ancestor or as the main "guardian animal" --the one in charge of regulating the spirit life of all creatures and insuring their procreation-- is widespread. One can find evidence for this sort of orientation from Siberia to North America as well as in Europe.

[Roz 2 (June 21)]

Certainly in those parts of the world where bears were found, the shaman often dressed up with the accoutrements of the bear, i.e. wearing its fur coat, a necklace of bear claws, painting his face to match that of the bear, walked like a bear, etc. These objects conferred upon the human the abilities of this "master animal guardian spirit". Later, I'll send you a great copy of an old photograph of a Lenape (Delaware) shaman, dressed up as a bear, the latter spirit being called the Mesingw.

However, at this juncture I should make it clear that my interest in all of this isn't particularly with the "healing" or "trance" parts which seem to be the focus of many contemporary works in the field of "shamanic studies". Rather I am concerned with discovering what the foundational schemas were which supported this view of reality,

particularly, the way that these beliefs tended to provide a control mechanism for insuring that human-nature interactions were governed by certain specific social practices, intended, in turn, to allow for system stability (sustainability of community, understood in the broadest sense).

There is little doubt in my mind at this point that the belief in the Bear Ancestor who would punish children for disobeying their parents was a key element in maintaining these practices: making sure that game would be abundant in the future. According to Paul Shepard, the basic tenet or foundational belief associated with this cosmogony was that of a ritual exteriorization of "trophic relations" and the embedding of interactiveness —of "the rule of eating and being eaten"—in the stories and their reenactment in performance art. In this way, we might argue that when examined closely the ursine belief system was one that incorporated the notion of "developmental systems theory" (Oyama, Griffiths, Gray, et al.) and the concept of "holarchy", Koestler's "hierarchy of holons", as well as the closely related concept of "panarchy" of Gunderson and Holling.

The ursine belief system did not put humans in "charge" of nature: it does not reflect a "dominionist" perspective. Instead, humans themselves descended from an animal —here we are not talking about totemism—namely, the bear. Therefore, humans were already situated cognitively inside-nature. The Bear Son saga does precisely this: it sets up a series of encounters between predator and prey in a cyclical narration of replenishment. Some day I hope to be able to put all of this together into a coherent essay.¹ The difficulty in doing so is that most people are not familiar with the basic notions, e.g., trophic relations and shamanic views of nature, that are essential for understanding the higher level analyses.

¹ The following is a footnote from one of my papers which will give you a somewhat better idea of what I am trying to get at:

In this ecocentric drama of trophic relations, Little Bear plays the role of the predator, while his adversary, the Serpent shaman, plays the role of his prey, his next meal. Shepard (p.c., 1995) has argued that the narrative relating to bear ancestors is directly linked to a cosmology that recognizes the complex network of relationships associated with the food chain: the narrative exteriorizes, in this sense, these trophic relations — the recognition of the cosmic significance of eating and being eaten — and gives them symbolic form. For example, seeing an eagle sweep down on its prey would not have been analogized to an act of violence but rather viewed as an act embodying the interdependences of all beings as well as a representing a reenactment of one of the key scenes from the cosmogonic drama encapsulated in the Bear Son saga [Little Bear shape shifts into an Eagle while his opponent, the old shaman, shape shifts into a pigeon]. Taking wilderness as its standard, the ritual landscape acts as a repository for the interlinking ecological relations that permit and actually require the coexistence of predator and prey. Rather than pitting an anthropomorphic hero against a wild beast and, hence, acting out the dualism typical of modern Western thought, the Bear Son narrative reaffirms interrelationships, that eating is a sacrament, highlighting Snyder's notion of "re-inhabitation" (Snyder 1974, 1990, 1995), which is related to Polyani's concept of "embedded" cultures (cf. Rogers 1994) and underlining Shepard's assertion concerning "native" cosmologies: they demonstrate the presence of a cautious willingness to consume and be consumed, both literally and in a mythic sense (Shepard 1995).

In summary, my interest is on recuperating 1) the cognitive architecture of the belief system itself and 2) the way in which the belief system functioned to insure balanced, sustainable relations with the natural world. Those relations were founded on a radically different (and remarkably modern) understanding of the highly complex and dynamic interactions holding between the different levels/parts of the natural world, i.e., the notion of an "ecosystem", and the humans (bear-humans) who inhabit(ed) it. In this sense, we are talking about a kind of bio-cultural belief system in which over many generations the story-teller(s) repeatedly drew upon the metaphorical/symbolic resources embodied in the narrative and related social practices (performance art, etc.).

In other words, from my vantage point we are not talking about an arcane and outdated cosmogony without any application to the environmental crisis currently facing us. Rather I see it as an exceptionally viable cognitive template that can be readily tested against the dominant Western notions of the acceptability of the endless exploitation of natural (and human) resources. Moreover, in contrast to the prevailing 19th century metaphor which projected onto the natural world the tenets of 19th century imperialism, e.g., the natural world was portrayed as a locus of constant warfare and was governed by "the rule of nature" or the "survival of the fittest", the latter concept being interpreted as the natural dominance of the being who was physically the "strongest" and most "powerful", e.g., the worldview of the so-called "social Darwinism" (which, as we are well aware, was in place long before Darwin ever lifted his pen to paper). In short, the Bear Ancestor narrative provides a vehicle for exploring another view of the world. In addition, this is not an alien belief system imported from some "exotically" remote corner of the planet, but rather one indigenous to Europe. Remnants of the earlier belief system are abundantly available once a person begins to learn where to look for them in our 21st century European cultural landscape.

[Roz 1 (June 16)]

> Quite curiously in reference to this pan-European belief in ursine
> origins, there is a mathematical modeling--a coordinate system-- that
> accompanied/complemented these older European cosmogonic beliefs.
> Indeed, the system itself survived right up to the time of the
> invention of the decimal metric modeling of the earth by Delambre and
> Mechain. I've published quite a bit on all of this, if it is a topic
> of interest to any one there.

[Claus 1 (June 16)]

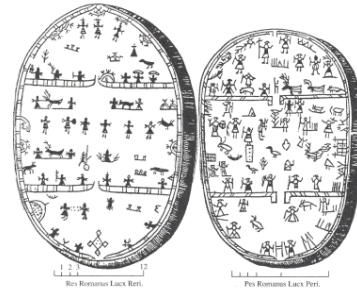
Indeed, I would like to know more about it! And if you allow for that, I would also ask you if I could paste into that page relevant parts of our correspondance on this?

[Roz 2 (June 21)]

I'll send you a copy of one of my papers which was written quite a while ago and which now I want to rewrite in order to emphasize the cognitive aspects of the data, e.g., the way that the human-body is utilized, in a particular way, as "the measure of all things". Also, I want to explore the role of "material metaphors" (Bono), the way that artifacts can embody or be used to offload cognition (Hutchins).

Finally, I'm attaching a couple pictures of shaman drums that shows the Upper, Middle and Lower Worlds. Feel free to use it and anything else I've written here. Of course, you probably should put up the source for the jpegs of the drum if you decide to put them on your web site. One of them explains the business (on your web site) about there being a "spirit" inside the drum, that is, what was attached to the underside of the drum was also important. That was also where they usually put the jangles.

First, there is a jpeg with two Saami drums from Pentikäinen, p. 144. The full reference is Pentikäinen, J., 1984, The Sámi shaman: mediator between man and universe, in *Shamanism in Eurasia. Part 1*, ed. M. Hoppál. Göttingen, Germany: Edition Herodot, 125-148.
 [see larger picture [here](#)²]



Second, there is a jpeg with the backside of a Chelkan shaman drum from Potapov, 1968, 212, fig. 4, (Potapov, L. P. , 1968, Shaman's drums of Altaic Ethnic Groups, in Diószegi, V. (ed.), *Popular Beliefs and Folklore Traditions*, 205-234. Budapest: Akadémia) reproduced on page 168 of Jankovics, M., 1984, Cosmic models and Siberian shaman drums, in M. Hoppál (ed.), *Shamanism in Eurasia. Part 1*, ed. M. Hoppál. Göttingen, Germany: Edition Herodot, 149-173.
 [see larger picture [here](#)³]



Figure 3.2: Shaman drum - ex Potapov 1968: 212, fig. 4 (Chelkan)

Best,

Roz

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> Roslyn M. Frank
 > Professor Emeritus
 > Department of Spanish & Portuguese
 > University of Iowa
 > Iowa City, IA 52242
 > Fax: (319)-335-2990
 > E-mail: roz-frank [at] uiowa.edu
 > <http://www.uiowa.edu/~spanport/personal/Frank/Frankframe.htm>
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² http://www.nbi.dk/~natphil/worldpicture/01_two_sh_drum.html

³ http://www.nbi.dk/~natphil/worldpicture/02_Shaman_drum_Jankovic.html